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SUBJECT: IRAQ: 2006 COUNTRY REPORTS ON TERRORISM

¶1. Embassy POC: Allison Monz; monza2@state.gov. Telephone: 914-822-9289.

¶2. (SBU) Iraq remains at the center in the global war on terror battling al-Qaida and affiliated terrorist organizations; insurgent groups fighting against Coalition Forces (CF); along with militias and death squads increasingly engaged in sectarian violence; and criminal organizations taking advantage of Iraq's deteriorating security situation. Terrorist organizations and insurgent groups continue to attack Coalition Forces primarily utilizing Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs). The GOI universally condemns terrorist groups and supports Coalition Forces (CF) against al-Qaida and its affiliates. The June 7, 2006 death of al-Qaida's Iraq leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, damaged the group's leadership, but did not diminish attacks against CF and Iraqis nor halt overall increasing attack trends by the group.

¶3. (SBU) Al-Qaida and affiliated groups continued attacks on Iraq's infrastructure and claimed responsibility for kidnappings and attacks against CF. Tribal leaders in Ramadi, a volatile city in Anbar province, banded together in late 2006 and pledged to fight against al-Qaida instead of CF. While their full effectiveness remains uncertain, this represents an important step in the fight to defeat al-Qaida. GOI-sponsored reconciliation programs aimed at reducing the sources of violence. The government has organized conferences involving tribal and religious leaders, politicians and civil society organizations, to both counter support for terrorist organizations and promote dialogue between Iraq's ethnic and religious groups in an effort to decrease violence.

4.(SBU) In 2006 the extent of Iraq's sectarian divide emerged following the February 22 bombing of the al-Askari Mosque, one of the holiest sites to Shia Muslims, located in Salah ad Din. While violence against both CF and Iraqis had been increasing prior to the bombing, this event exacerbated sectarian tensions and led to increased violence in Iraq's ethnically-mixed areas, especially Baghdad. Sectarian attacks, including car bombs, suicide vests, sniper fire, and targeted assassinations, occur on a daily basis with Iraqi civilians suffering the majority of casualties. Iraq's sectarian violence furthers the terrorists' goals by creating instability and weakening the GOI.

¶5. (SBU) Neighboring countries, specifically Iran and Syria, continue to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs smuggling weapons, people and materials to terrorist, insurgent and militia groups inside Iraq. Iranian agents and sympathizers utilize an 800-mile long, porous border with limited security to transport their goods. Increasingly, these materials include Iranian-made weapons such as Explosively Formed

Projectiles (EFPs) or their components, which have proven effective in attacks against CF.

¶6. (SBU) In recent statements GOI leaders, including the Prime Minister, the President and the Foreign Minister, have called on neighboring countries to stop interfering in Iraq's internal affairs and to stop supporting elements actively fighting against Iraq's elected government. In 2006 Syria's Foreign Minister traveled to Baghdad and agreed to cooperate more closely on border security in an effort to reduce the number of foreign fighters entering Iraq. Senior GOI officials, including Iraqi President Talabani, traveled to Iran throughout 2006 encouraging the Iranian government to support Iraq's political process and to stop material support of terrorist groups and militias.

¶7. (SBU) In an effort to further demonstrate that the GOI would not allow Iraq to become a safe-haven for terrorist organizations, the GOI has taken a proactive position against the Kurdistan Workers Party (Kongra-Gel/PKK), an internationally designated terrorist organization. In late 2006, Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, appointed the Minister of State for National Security, Shirwan al-Waeli, as the Iraq coordinator for PKK issues. Tension between Turkey and the GOI increased in late 2006 as GOT leaders expressed increasing frustration at what they viewed as GOI inaction against the PKK.

¶8. (SBU) As the GOI continues to build its capacity to fight terrorist organizations, continued USG and international support will be required. While a proven ally in the war on terror, Iraq's developing security forces require further training and resources before they can effectively address the groups already operating within their borders. Iraq's intelligence services continue to improve in both competency and confidence but they also require additional support before they will be able to adequately identify and respond to internal and external terrorist threats. The international community's support for investment and reconstruction are critical components needed to ensure that the GOI's plans to reduce violence, improve services and increase economic opportunities are successful.

¶9. (SBU) Known terrorist groups in Iraq, in addition to the Kongra-Gel/PKK include:

-- Al-Qaida Iraq (Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn) and the Islamic State of Iraq: This group is ideologically affiliated with al-Qaida and is responsible for attacks against CF and Iraqis. The June 7 death of Zarqawi damaged the group's leadership structure, although it did not change its central mission of expelling CF from Iraq and toppling Iraq's elected government. Its current leader is known as Abu Hamza al-Muhajir. In January 2006 press reports indicated that AQI teamed with several smaller Sunni Islamist groups devoted to continuing the insurgency calling themselves the Mujahideen Shura Council. By late 2006, this group renamed itself the Islamic State of Iraq. The group claimed responsibility for kidnapping two US soldiers in June 2006.

-- Ansar al-Sunnah: This Sunni-dominated extremist group has fought against CF since 2003. It is dedicated to expelling CF and establishing an Islamic state based on Sharia law. In 2006 this group took responsibility for several kidnappings and targeted assassinations

-- Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK): This group formed in the 1960s in Tehran University as a response to Iran's Shah who the founders believed to be corrupt. The group was exiled from Iran in 1979 after the Islamic Revolution. Saddam Hussein offered the group refuge in exchange for support during the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s. In 2003 MEK members were targeted by CF due to previous ties with Saddam. They immediately negotiated a cease-fire and have since been living in CF-protected camps in Iraq.

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